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ABSTRACT

A number of cross-cultural researchers have proposed that the most important dimension of cross-cultural variation is that of individualism-collectivism. It seems likely that general cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism might be expressed in ideas about potential mates. The purpose of this study was to directly compare the rankings of importance of 10 qualities of the opposite-sex ideal for young adolescent in four countries, the individualistic nations of Iceland and the United States, and the more collectivist nations of Mexico and Guatemala. Participants, 600 young adolescents 11 to 16 years old, included 49 students from Iceland, 341 students from the United States, 88 from Mexico, and 122 from Guatemala. The questionnaire was administered in the local language. Although significant differences in the qualities of the opposite-sex ideal were demonstrated, the values expressed did not correspond to the country groupings according to individualism and collectivism. Only in their rankings of the quality of being very intelligent did adolescents from the collectivist nations Mexico and Guatemala respond similarly to each other, and significantly differently from the individualistic nations of the United States and Iceland. Thus, while adolescents' views of the opposite-sex ideal reflect their cultural values, the four nationalities each generated a unique pattern of values. (ABL)

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Adolescents' Opposite-sex Ideal in Four Countries

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Abstract

Six hundred young adolescents (11 to 16 years old) from four countries (Iceland, Guatemala, United States, and Mexico) ranked the importance of ten qualities of the opposite-sex ideal person. Each of the four nationalities generated a unique pattern of values.

Introduction

A number of cross-cultural researchers have proposed that the most important dimension of cross-cultural variation is that of individualism - collectivism (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1980; 1983; Kagitcibasi & Berry, 1989; Triandis, 1990; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). One of the first researchers to note the importance of individualism and collectivism in cross-national research was Hofstede (1980) who identified this dimension through factor analysis of work values. Hofstede described individualism as an I- consciousness, an identity based in the individual, and a belief in individual decisions. Collectivism incorporated a we-consciousness, an identity based in the social system, and a belief in group decisions. Triandis and his colleagues have systematically studied individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1990; Triandis et al., 1986, Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988) and concluded that in the U.S.A. individualism is correlated with self-reliance and freedom. In many parts of the world collectivism is related to family integrity and family unity. Schwartz & Bilsky (1987) have examined collectivism-individualism in terms of values. Using cluster analysis, they identified three clusters of individualistic values (self-direction, achievement, and enjoyment), and three clusters of collectivist values (prosocial values, conformity, and security).

It seems likely that general cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism might be expressed in ideas about potential mates. There is some support for this idea through the studies of Buss and his associates (1990) who studied the qualities deemed to be important in a potential mate among late adolescents and

young adults of 37 different cultures. Using multidimensional scaling techniques, they found a dimension which appeared to be similar to that of individualism- collectivism. Their results showed that chastity and good housekeeping were more important qualities in the ideal mate for young people from collectivist countries. An exciting personality was more important in a potential mate according to young people from individualistic cultures. Although the scores of participants from mainland United States did not differ greatly from the international mean, U.S.A. participants did place significantly lesser value on intelligence of the preferred mate.

Another study provided further evidence for a relation between individualism - collectivism and the qualities preferred in the opposite-sex person (Gibbons, Stiles, & Morton, 1990). Adolescents from individualistic countries placed more emphasis on the qualities of being "fun" and "sexy" in the opposite -sex ideal than did adolescents from collectivist countries. These qualities, fun and sexy, may reflect the "exciting personality", found to be more important in individualistic nations (Buss, et al., 1990).

The stage of early adolescence is associated with increased cognitive abilities and a surge in idealism (Elkind, 1984). The ideals that young adolescents hold reflect, in part, their cultural values. Adolescents are also intensely concerned with gender (Hill & . nch, 1983) and with the opposite-sex ideal (Curry & Hock, 1981). In our studies we have asked adolescents to rank qualities of the ideal man or woman. We have studied adolescents' descriptions of the ideal person in many parts of the world, including Guatemala, the United States, Mexico, and Iceland. However, we have not yet directly compared the views of teenagers from these four nations (Gibbons, Stiles, Schnellmann, & Morales-Hidalgo,1990; Stiles, Gibbons, Hardardottir, & Schnellmann, 1987; Stiles, Gibbons, & Schnellmann, 1987).

The purpose of present study was to directly compare the rankings of importance of 10 qualities of the opposite-sex ideal for young adolescents in four countries, the individualistic nations of Iceland and the United States, and the more collectivist nations of Mexico and Guatemala (Hofstede, 1983). We hypothesized that

adolescents living in more individualistic countries such as the U.S.A. and Iceland, would value being fun and sexy in the opposite-sex ideal more than would adolescents living in collectivistic countries such as Mexico and Guatemala.

Method

As a part of other studies (Gibbons, et al. 1990; Stiles, et al., 1987; Stiles, et al., 1990), adolescents (11 to 16 years old) ranked the importance of 10 characteristics of the opposite-sex ideal. Lower ranks represented greater importance for that trait. Participants included 600 students from four countries: Iceland (49), United States (341), Mexico (88), and Guatemala (122). The questionnaire, adapted from Clifford, Grandgenett, and Bardwell (1981) was administered in the local language (i.e. English in the United States, Icelandic in Iceland, and Spanish in Mexico and Guatemala). The back-translation procedure was used to verify the translations.

Results

The ranks were analyzed by means of a Kruskal-Wallis test with the 4 nationalities as the independent variable. Scheffe-like post hocs were used for contrasts between specific groups. The results, presented in Table 1, demonstrated significant differences among adolescents from different countries in their mean ranks of the qualities liking children, being intelligent, having a lot of money, being kind and honest, being fun, having good looks, and being sexy.

Discussion

Although significant differences in the qualities of the opposite-sex ideal were demonstrated, the values expressed did not correspond to the country groupings according to individualism and collectivism. Only in their rankings of being very intelligent did adolescents from the collectivist nations Mexico and Guatemala respond similarly to each other, and significantly differently than adolescents from the individualist nations U.S.A. and Iceland. Thus, while adolescents' views of the opposite-sex ideal reflect their cultural values, the four nationalities (U.S.A., Iceland, Guatemala, and Mexico) each generated a unique pattern of values.

For example, Icelandic adolescents responded in a collectivist manner in that liking children was seen as very important in the ideal person. However, like the U.S.A. adolescents, Icelandic teenagers viewed intelligence as relatively less important in the ideal.

Compared to other groups, U.S.A. adolescents valued having a lot of money, being fun, sexy, and good looking. The qualities of fun and sexy appear to be similar to the finding of Buss et al. (1990) that having an exciting personality is important in individualistic countries. The association between individualism and affluence has been noted by others (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1990). Triandis, for example, has pointed out that having a lot of money allows one to pursue individual interests (Triandis, 1990).

On the whole the Guatemalan adolescents demonstrated collectivism in their values about the ideal person, in that liking children was ranked as important and appearance was ranked as unimportant. Although Mexican adolescents valued intelligence, kindness, and honesty (consistent with collectivism), they also ranked appearance as relatively important.

In summary, while the U.S.A. adolescents' values concerning the opposite-sex ideal appeared to evidence cultural individualism and Guatemalan adolescents' values cultural collectivism, adolescents from Iceland and Mexico responded in a more complex manner, not clearly related to the dimension of individualism - collectivism. Thus, as Buss and his associates (1990) have shown for an older sample, individuals of different cultures generate patterns of values not easily described on a single dimension.

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Values associated with Individualism and Collectivism

Researchers	Individualism	Collectivism
Hofstede (1983)	•"I" consciousness • identity based in the individual	•"We" consciousness • identity based in the social group
Triandis (1990)	• self-reliance and freedom	• family integrity
Schwartz & Bilsky (1987)	• self-direction • achievement • enjoyment	• prosocial values • conformity • security

Overhead 2: The questionnaire

Do not write your name on this paper.

The following questions have to do with yourself.

Age 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Boy..... Girl.....

School..... Grade

Nationality.....

Questionnaire: The Ideal Woman
If you wished to describe the perfect woman, how important would each of the characteristics listed below be? Find the most important characteristic of the ideal woman in this list and put the number 1 beside it. Then find the next most important characteristic and put a 2 beside it. Continue until you have ranked all of the characteristics using the numbers 1 through 10.

___ She likes kids

___ She has average height and weight

___ She is very intelligent

___ She has a lot of money

___ She is kind and honest

___ She is fun

___ She is popular

___ She has good looks

___ She is sexy

___ She has a good job

On the other side of this page please draw a picture (not a stick figure) of the "ideal woman doing something. Please write comments on your drawing and tell us what this person is doing. It doesn't matter whether or not you can draw well; we're very interested in seeing what you draw the "ideal woman" doing.

Overhead 3: The questionnaire in Spanish

Somos investigadoras que queremos saber más sobre adolescentes.
Queremos saber como tú describes al hombre ideal.

Por favor se completamente sincera al contestar este cuestionario.

No escribas tu nombre en este papel.

Por favor marca tu edad

11 años 12 años 13 años 14 años 15 años 16 años

Cuestionario: El Hombre Ideal

Si quisiéras describir al hombre ideal, que tan importante serián cada una de las características en las lista que sique? Encuentra la característica más importante del hombre ideal y pon el número 1 en frente. Después encuentra la característica que sique en importancia y pon el numbero 2 en frenta. Continúa hasta que hayas puesto todas las características en orden de importancia, usando los números del 1 al 10.

_____ Le gustan los niños

_____ es de estatura y peso común

_____ es muy inteligente

_____ tiene mucho dinero

_____ es bueno y honrado

_____ es divertido

_____ es popular

_____ es guapo

_____ es "sexy"

_____ tiene un buen trabajo

En el reverso de esta hoja por favor haz un dibujo de tu "hombre ideal" haciendo algo. Por favor comenta por escrito sobre tu dibujo y dinos que es lo que esta persona está haciendo.

Table 1. Differences among mean ranks of qualities of the opposite-sex ideal for adolescents from Iceland, the United States, Guatemala, and Mexico.

He/She likes kids

Country	Iceland	Guatemala	Mexico	U.S.A.
Mean Rank	165.38	199.38	276.98	362.16

He/She is very intelligent

Country	Mexico	Guatemala	U.S.A.	Iceland
Mean Rank	225.99	233.71	333.5	370.93

He/She has a lot of money

Country	U.S.A.	Iceland	Guatemala	Mexico
Mean Rank	270.87	276.59	325.69	393.71

He/She is kind and honest

Country	Mexico	Guatemala	Iceland	U.S.A.
Mean Rank	221.53	280.66	288.60	329.69

He/She is fun

Country	U.S.A.	Iceland	Mexico	Guatemala
Mean Rank	274.76	300.42	321.97	357.00

He/She has good looks

Country	U.S.A.	Mexico	Iceland	Guatemala
Mean Rank	267.22	297.03	335.24	382.07

He/She is sexy

Country	U.S.A.	Iceland	Guatemala	Mexico
Mean Rank	253.82	340.31	365.99	368.45

Note. All means connected by a line are nonsignificant at the .05 level.